Title: "Fetch me my feathers and amber" : Gary Snyder on civilization and the primitive

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"Fetch Me My Feathers and Amber": Gary Snyder on Civilization and the Primitive

All together elsewhere, vast
Herds of reindeer move across
Miles and miles of golden moss,
Silently and stay fast.
W.H. Auden, from "The Fall of Rome"

 [1]

Gary Snyder, one of the most eminent and influential poets and thinkers in the American literary world, has claimed that "human culture is rooted in the primitive and the Paleolithic," adding that "our body is a vertebrate mammal being – and our souls are out in the wilderness."[2] These words best fit

[1] The Hump-backed Flute Player. "The hump-backed flute player / walks all over. / Sits on the boulders around the Great Basin / his hump is a pack." An image used by Snyder throughout his Pulitzer-prize winning book of poems entitled *Turtle Island* (1975). "Ancient rock art – petroglyphs – of a walking flute-playing figure, sometimes with a hump on his back, are found widely in the Southwest and into Mexico. These images are several thousand years old. There is a Hopi secret society that takes the Flute-player as its emblem. Some of the figures have an erect penis, and some have feelers on their heads that look like insect antennae. It has been suggested that the hump is possibly a pack, and that the figure may represent Aztec or Toltec wandering traders, who once came up into the Southwest with trade items. In Peru even today you can see young men with a sort of sling-pack on their backs, carrying a load and playing the flute while walking." For a more detailed study see: Gary Snyder, *Mountains and Rivers Without End* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 1996), pp. 81, 162–163.

[2] Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (New York: North Point Press, 1999), p. 182.

with the poetry of archeology – "hunting among stones," human search for lost origins, which has been a growing mode, an oft-taken path in the U.S. poetry throughout the seventies and eighties; a descent – not to the mythical underworld, but to the land, underground. Exploring and investigating the detritus pathways of the American Northwest, Snyder goes down Native myths and legends, leaves off names imposed by strangers to scratch the surface and to descend to the long-forgotten layers of human existence on earth, and in his case, on the continent. Conversely, the Whitmanian poem that America was meant to be appears as just another layer with myriads of other layers covered with ashes of neglect and oppression spread over the lines on the land made forty thousand years ago when:

> human people came with basket hats and nets
> winter-houses underground
> yew bows painted green,
> feasts and dances for the boys and girls
> songs and stories in the smoky dark.[3]

The Snyderian metaphor for the continent is that of the palimpsest, whose porous structure is being gradually inscribed with different lines imposed by different social orders turning the land bruised and beaten, but it is only then that "the image becomes clear; we are part of an immense palimpsest; the U.S.A. is but a superficial layer, the most recent (and damaging) inscription over a series of earlier texts."[4] "The land," Snyder says "is also a living being – at another pace."[5] Due to the plurality of points of intersection between the human and the more-than-human world, "civilizations east and west have long been on a collision course with wild nature."[6] Only when we allow ourselves to know that "wildness is not just the "preservation of the world," as Snyder says, but "it *is* the world,"[7] can we afford to think what civilization we actually need, namely, the one that can "live fully and creatively together with wildness,"[8] for much information is taken from deep inside civilization, from wildness, the biological and social sciences. By this very act Snyder leaves off the concept of the frontier, thus re-energizing mountain ridges, rivers and plains, re-discovering the land by taking a great effort of the imagination

[3] Snyder, "What Happened Here Before," in *Turtle Island* (New York: New Directions Press, 1974), p. 79.

[4] Edwin Folsom, "Gary Snyder's Descent to Turtle Island: Searching for Fossil Love," *Western American Literature*, vol. 15 (1985), pp. 103–121.

[5] Folsom, "Gary Snyder's Descent," p. 107.

[6] Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 6.

[7] Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 6.

[8] Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*, p. 6.

to retreat from the civilization into the wilderness; an act of re-opening the frontier contradictory to what, over a century earlier, Frederick Jackson Turner called the closure of the frontier.

Re-opening the frontier becomes a sort of an attempt to dissolve a dichotomy between the civilized and the wild. It looms as erasing the imposed and heading towards that which is given; it involves untying the cords once stated as final and fixed, and loosening the social order on behalf of the natural order; it means replacing greed with humility. As Snyder admits in his inspiring essay entitled "Poetry and the Primitive,"

> much has been said about the frontier in the American history, but overlooking perhaps some key points: the American confrontation with a vast wild ecology, an earthly paradise of grass, water, and game – was mind-shaking.[9]

Therefore, Snyder – with his deep interests in cultural anthropology and prehistory – speaks on behalf of the natural order, which brings forth some affinities with another Californian, Robinson Jeffers, who spoke for the non-human and saw the world as falling away from the wild American past. Snyder, likewise Jeffers, though in general, far more playful and joyous in his interpretation of wild nature,[10] presents himself as a critic of the type of social organization called civilization, adding that human beings are not to be particularly fearful in regard to nature, though they have reasons to be fearful of civilization for "civilization originates in conquest abroad and repression at home."[11]

Descent to the Primitive and Back 

Snyder's critique of civilization always touches upon and interpenetrates the vestiges within the more-than-human world after its collision with the human; it deeply involves the relation – lurking somewhere in the ancient times,

[9] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive" in *Earth House Hold* (New York: New Directions Press, 1969), p. 119.

[10] Jeffer's "inhumanism" and deep distrust in the human and the trends of his nation is in Snyder transfixed into the so-called "panhumanism" and a joyous interpretation of the world's deep, intricate, interrelated, "detritus pathways" which, stored in the mind, open up the world as a field of interconnected lives which consist of all the human and more-than-human.

[11] Stanley Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive. A Critique of Civilization* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2007), p. 11.

myriads of layers underground – of the human and nature. The source for his many comments upon the nature of civilization is found in a book of poems entitled *Regarding Wave*, where in the "Long Hair" section, the poet introduces the civilization theme with the notion of revolution. However, the revolution, which underlies all conquests and its oppressive apparatus, here involved in a play on a Trotskyist slogan, is now turned inside out. Namely, it is "the revolution in the revolution in the revolution," where the very word comes to lose its power when reiterated all over again as in mantras, since finally there are no boundaries that separate the pre-conquest and the post-conquest land but all is inscribed within one single, though many-layered, palimpsest. ("& POWER / comes out of the seed-syllables of mantras.")[12] The only revolution this can be is the revolution of the unconscious which is to be found beyond the class-structured society or mass ego.[13] Snyder says:

> Class-structured civilized society is a kind of mass ego. To transcend the ego is to go beyond society as well. "Beyond" there lies, inwardly, the unconscious. Outwardly, the equivalent of the unconscious is the wilderness: both of these terms meet, one step even farther on, as *one*.[14]

To go beyond the ego is to go beyond the self for "it is ultimately man's self that is imperialized as the civilization spreads and deepens."[15] "Revolution in the Revolution..." surpasses political boundaries and strives for true Communionism beyond all nation-states, for each part of the land is surrounded by another larger area interlaced with yet other layers of life, where the masses – the standing people, the creeping people, the swimming people, the flying people – lead their lives in desperation, though no longer quiet,

[12] See Gary Snyder, "The Voice as a Girl," in *Earth House Hold*, p. 123. Snyder explains that "certain emotions and states occasionally seize the body, one becomes a whole tube of air vibrating; all voice. In mantra chanting, the magic utterances, built of seed-syllables such as OM and AYNG and AH, repeated over and over, fold and curl on the breath until – when most weary and bored – a new voice enters, a voice speaks through you clearer and stronger than what you know of yourself; with a sureness and melody of its own, singing out the inner song of the self, and of the planet."

[13] In "Wondrous Figures and Forms" Robert Schuler in his discussion of "Burning" (the third section of the volume *Myths and Texts*) says that "Force, whether supplied by mind or body, cannot make a change. The only revolution is the revolution of the spirit [...]. It is important to note that the spiritual revolutionary, the model for Snyder's poetics, is a determined character with firm values. He will not use force, but he will also not back off from executing what is spiritually correct in: Robert Jordan Schuler, *Journeys Towards the Original Mind. The Long Poems of Gary Snyder* (Peter Lang: N.Y.-Washington D.C.: 1994), pp. 53–54.

[14] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 122.

[15] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 10.

to invert the famous Thoreauvian phrase. The Sioux's other people became "the masses" – among trees, water, air and grasses – necessary to the state, just as "native communities were the ground out of which the earliest, class-structured, territorially defined civilizations arose."[16] Therefore, the ground with all unique patterns, lines, scratches, forming up drawings, depicting ways of living; trails, then finally roads, directing and redirecting individuals in their life-long travels upon the surface of the earth, already engraved with eons of lives and deaths, tinged with emotions issuing from songs and poems, dances, rituals of rebirth – the entire palimpsest, used and used up, again and again, becomes re-created and re-imagined by Snyder's descent to the ground in search for some authenticity, the right balance, real values. Such opening – which lies in contradistinction to progress and civilization with its race towards that which is almost sterile in its perfection, final, immaculate, automatized, and distant in its heavenly abstract form – is a tremendous task of digging through projections of civilization, the imposed and the rejected, the scratches violently carved both in the land and in the minds of those pushed to the frontiers, then down, underground.

However, to withdraw from the society half-bent on its destructive, though highly-efficient lifestyles, would suggest an analogous retreat in some utopian vision reverberating with tribal passions and archaic values.[17] Instead of any retreat and replacement Snyder adheres to the concept of a modern man as being contemporary with all periods.

> Part of our being modern is the very fact of our awareness that we are one with our beginnings – contemporary with all periods – members of all cultures. The seeds of every social structure or custom are in the mind.[18]

Therefore, the Snyderian descent is never without return, it draws on the thought of the American anthropologist Stanley Diamond who has said that "the sickness of civilization consists in its failure to incorporate (and only then) to move beyond the limits of the primitive"[19]; it is concerned more with our awareness of the process of countless cross-fertilizations of cultures and languages, where human being is part of this network of related parts, tiny fragments absorbing and absorbed heading towards transformation. While

[16] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 8.

[17] Snyder says, "as a poet I hold the most archaic values on earth. They go back to the late Paleolithic; the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth; the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe" ("Poetry and the Primitive," *Earth House Hold*, back cover).

[18] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 126.

[19] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 126.

drawing on the primitive, Snyder calls on to harken to the roots and reconsider our beginnings as some whirls in the knot, forces blooming, bursting and scattering of seed throughout the continent and the entire planet. Therefore, the thought implicit in his notes on the primitive revolves around "the power to move away from the self-imposed limitations of small-minded social systems."[20] Snyder writes:

> Today we are aware as never before of the plurality of human lifestyles and possibilities, while at the same time being tied, like in an old silent movie, to a runaway locomotive rushing headlong toward a very singular catastrophe.[21]

As humans live within skin, ego, society, species boundaries they tend to ignore that "consciousness has boundaries of different order," and that "the mind is free."[22] Moreover, "imagination, intuition, intellect, wit, decision, speed, skill, were fully developed forty thousand years ago,"[23] which reverses popular misconceptions about the primitive, as Folsom says. Humans, cognizant of the destructive industrial and technological growth, and addicted to fossil fuels, are not the ones to hold the wisdom, techniques and attitudes that would allow them to live, continue to live on earth for long periods. The time we live in is anomalous, devastating the old traditions, "the old ways" neglecting the wisdom, losing the balance along with sane, healthy existence, a symbiosis with other lives. Hence, part of our being modern is to witness the extinction of species, and the uncovering of boundaries; it is to be exposed to the growth of greed; it means fighting the old myths and stories and searching for relief in abstractions – cleansed, white, immaculate, intangible beliefs of a better place, while hiding ourselves in the Metropole, easily sliding in loveless schemes and forms, societies of our contemporaries. Being modern entails indulging in comforts and easy solutions; however, on deeper levels it is experiencing isolation and "placelessness,"[24] while the place of elders is often taken by books; whereas, the local, kin-based, or tribal populations are slowly absorbed by the Metropole, smoothed out to integrate, only to wither away with the all-devouring now.[25]

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[20] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 127.

[21] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 126.

[22] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 127.

[23] Folsom, "Gary Snyder's Descent," p. 104.

[24] For a more detailed account on "placelessness" see: Robert Adams, "Not Here Yet. Remarks by Gary Snyder on Buddhism, Ecology & the Poetics of Homelessness," *Shambhala Sun*, vol. 2, no. 4 (1994), pp. 18–25.

[25] Stanley Diamond, quoted in Gary Snyder, *The Real Work. Interviews and Talks 1964–1979* (New York: New Directions Press, 1980), p. 115.

"Civilization"

> At the root of the problem where our civilization goes wrong is the mistaken belief that nature is something less than authentic, that nature is not as alive as man is, or as intelligent, that in a sense it is dead, and the animals are of so low an order of intelligence and feeling, we need not take their feelings into account.[26]

In Pueblo Indian societies there was a strong sympathy between humans and animals. Through certain dances and rituals animals were given a place and a voice in the political discussions, which was a kind of "ultimate democracy."[27] Animals, plants and a variety of wildlife were therefore the "people" of the land (the swimming people, the flying people, the creeping people and the standing people).[28] Nonetheless, a line was drawn to separate primitive peoples and civilized peoples. The line which divides our lives into authentic and inauthentic; forested and stoned; wild and tame; balanced and imbalanced; compassionate and enclosed in one's own self, is the line sieving the old teachings, cleansing them of the natural human-nature relation and of the western pre-white history replaced by the history written by the conquerors and discoverers. Perhaps "civilization has something to learn from the primitive."[29] There is

> [s]omething to be learned from the native American people about where we are. It can't be learned from anybody else. We have a western white history of a hundred and fifty years; but when we look at a little bit of American Indian folklore, myth, read a tale, we're catching just the tip of an iceberg of forty or fifty thousand years of human experience, on this continent, in this place.[30]

Drawing on from the uncivilized side, while scrutinizing the native American trails, Snyder delves into the depths, the soil of his continent and pans for wisdom like miners panned for gold in mid-nineteenth century in the land where he now resides, Nevada County. Panning for wisdom is a struggle to find "common human elements;" it is to re-discover the world in its nakedness, authentic, fundamental elements like birth, love, death; "the sheer fact of being alive."[31] It is to re-configure perception, re-consider the Blakean

[26] Snyder, "The Wilderness," in *Turtle Island*, p. 107.
[27] Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p. 104.
[28] Snyder, "The Wilderness," p. 108.
[29] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 120.
[30] Snyder, quoted in Folsom, "Gary Snyder's Descent," p. 107.
[31] Snyder, *Earth House Hold*, p. 118.

looking "with the eye," more sensitively, to see the beautiful along with the terrible, to reconstruct the "seamless web of man and nature, the enveloping silence of their primordial relationship, that long originally shattered."[32]

A number of essays and poems were written in relation to the civilization theme among which the poem "Civilization," composed by Snyder during his Japan years, looms as medley of voices issuing from the scratched land, from the silenced people of the land.

> Those are the people who do complicated things.
> They'll grab us by the thousands
> and put us to work.
> World's going to hell, with all these
> Villages and trails.
> Wild duck flocks aren't
> What they used to be.
> Aurochs[33] grow rare.
> *Fetch me my feathers and amber.*[34]

As history has always been written by the conquerors, so has been the history of civilization. As writing was itself "an instrument for the recording of official histories,"[35] then the use of symbols became explicit, they lost certain richness whereas writing became "an ideological instrument of incalculable power."[36] Diamond continues in this vein:

> Man's word was no longer an endless exploration of reality, but a sign that could be used against him. [...] For writing splits consciousness in two ways – it becomes more authoritative than talking, thus degrading the meaning of speech and eroding oral tradition; and it makes it possible to use words for the political manipulation and control of others. Written signs supplant memory.[37]

[32] Robert Kern quoted by Philip Jay Lewitt, "Gary Snyder and the Vow," in *Kyoto Review*, vol. 23 (1990), p. 7.

[33] Aurochs: "Aurochs are from earlier and prehistoric Europe, huge wild cattle (*Bos taurus premigenius*). The word aurochs is of itself singular. Plural is aurochses. It has been extinct for many centuries now, but was still around in small numbers in Roman times. It may be the ancestor of contemporary cattle species – all Bos. It was also in North Africa. I'm sure it roamed about in what is today Poland. It is not the same as the European bison. Sometimes it was referred to as the Urus. It is very elegantly represented in SW European cave art, especially Lascaux. The word is apparently from Old High German." Gary Snyder's e-mail message, March 8, 2010.

[34] Snyder, "Civilization" in *Regarding Wave* (New York: New Directions Press, 1970), p. 84.

[35] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 3.

[36] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 4.

[37] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 4.

Snyder in his counter-cultural approach to the nature of civilization reverses the purpose of writing and speaks on behalf of those who remained silenced, the "ruthlessly exploited classes" for there are no conventional ways of knowing unless facts are written down or created anew. Diamond concludes that in this way "achievements of civilization are reduced to their proper proportions."[38]

In ritual dances of the Pueblo Indians animals were speaking through people to make their point, they seized an individual and then he danced as deer would dance, or impersonated a squash blossom; "they were no longer speaking for humanity, they were taking it on themselves to interpret, through their humanity, what these other life-forms were."[39] Therefore, the spokesmanship for the rest of the world pervades the first part of the verse, and makes it clear that in order to become conspicuous one needs to be useful; in order to be audible one's history needs to be cleansed of complexities and reduced to the written word before it is told out loud. Therefore, here the silenced are given a voice and a place to articulate the unarticulated, to describe the non-describable. Like in mantra chanting, "expiration, 'voiced', makes the signals by which species connects,"[40] endowing human beings with an intrinsic capability of "interpreting the inwardness of the acts of others."[41] Only by changes in consciousness are we able to communicate *par excellence*, to "empathize with what we do not directly share."[42] To communicate with others is to assume that they are as we are, somehow in a way that people of the primitive cultures appreciated animals as other people off on various trips.[43] As paths and trails came to be covered and crossed with concrete, asphalt, thus pushed down beneath the layers of the American present, the native animal-people's earlier ways have tended to disappear, mutilated and torn, as the palimpsest itself gradually became enriched with multitudinous layers of man's culture; but undeniably, the poem leaves us with the presupposition which is forever drifting in our minds, and winding through deeper levels of understanding, namely, "civilized man cannot know what has been gained until he learns what has been lost."[44] Thus, the poem seems to be weighting human deeds on earth; balancing the trails lost and gained throughout time, both in the sky and on the land, indicating the intolerable condition of gradual displacement and finally, disappearance of species, their trails, the primal kinship of man and nature. Snyder reaffirms archaic values which he

[38] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 2.
[39] Snyder, *Turtle Island*, p. 109.
[40] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 123.
[41] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 212.
[42] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 212.
[43] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 121.
[44] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 121.

juxtaposes with the "current aberration of human society called civilization."[45] Therefore, "fetch me my feathers and amber" is a focus on that which is non-existent in its palpable form since it belongs to songs and stories, sung and told, and dying along with natives of that land. Amber, so rich in symbolism – (healing properties, general protection, a charm against evil spirits) – is in the native American context the sunstone of creation and new beginnings; in the Scandinavian context – a sea-stone, or in Greek myths – a solidified sunshine taken away from heavens and sunk down into the sea. Conjoined within the fossilized resin are the sky and the sea. "Feathers and amber" can be read as emblems implicit in the native American beliefs, in the whole oral tradition, which now appears to be waning in the overwhelming entanglement of artificially glowing roads offering divergent forms of freedom and comfort. "Fetch me my feathers and amber" looms as a "puzzled search," to use Diamond's phrase, "for what is diminished." In other words, it is "the search for different ways of being human,"[46] underlined with interrelatedness with more-than-human world. Moreover, it is a caring, considerate look at particular layers of the palimpsest where lives of others continue and end as ours. In the second stanza of "Civilization" Snyder beholds a small cricket occupying a tiny part of his typescript page.

> A small cricket
> On the typescript page of
> "Kyoto born in spring song"
> Grooms himself in time with *The Well-Tempered Clavier.*
> I quit typing and watch him thru a glass.
> How well articulated! How neat!
> Nobody understands the ANIMAL KINGDOM.[47]

A close and careful, though momentary attention is paid to the cricket that landed on a piece of paper with Snyder's poem from *Regarding Wave*'s second section. The cricket looms as attuned with the rest of creation, and with world's recognizable music such as *The Well-Tempered Clavier* – "well articulated" and "neat." Although the cricket's simple form is harmoniously integrated with the living world and thus reminds us of nature's own intrinsic, complex tunes, its own music issuing from the very authenticity of being alive is neither recognized nor understood and unheard by many. Implicit in the poem is its link with poetry in general, since "music, dance, religion,

[45] Patrick D. Murphy, *A Place for Wayfaring. The Poetry and Prose of Gary Snyder* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2000), p. 103.

[46] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 120.

[47] Snyder, "Civilization," p. 84.

and philosophy [...] have archaic roots – a shared origin with poetry;"[48] emphasizing the fact that poetry must sing or speak from authentic experience. Therefore Snyder ends the poem with a short reflection: "When creeks are full / The poems flow / When creeks are down / We heap stones."[49] The image of a riverbed is suggestive of his individual lifelong practice – an integration of intellectual and physical work, the flow of poems as well as placing stones to build trails are acts that Snyder refers to as the real work that nourishes community. Words read as stones laid down in the real world are fragmented remnants of that which is the past projected upon the future with "civilization" being the middle term.[50] Gathered in it are all lines of the palimpsest we step on, with cave drawings, petroglyphs, hieroglyphs, mounds, mazes, tombs.

Heaping stones, or hunting among stones, or panning for wisdom and writing poems are all acts to search for human identity, common human elements, for the primitive which itself may occur an idea, as Diamond reflects, that civilization creates in the search for human identity. Nevertheless, this is the positive direction, but – as Snyder maintains – in the prose and verse it is frequently described as a "non": non-Western, non-Christian, non-white, non-capitalist, non-national, non-military, non-civilization. The struggle and tension it incorporates is to create a mind purified of the lusts and greeds of history. Therefore, the restoration of the primitive would permit the inclusion of rituals that pave the way to the ecstatic, the passionate, the physical.[51]

[48] Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive," p. 118.

[49] Snyder, "Civilization," p. 84.

[50] Diamond, *In Search of the Primitive*, p. 208.

[51] Gary Snyder Archives, Interviews, Special Collections Library, University of California, Davis, California.

Gabriela Marszołek

„Zwróć mi me pióra i bursztyn" Gary Snyder o cywilizacji i prymitywizmie

Streszczenie

Powracając do koncepcji patrzenia na kontynent amerykański jako na palimpsest szlaków, Gary Snyder przywraca prymitywne wierzenia minionych epok, takie jak: harmonia, prawdziwe wartości i odpowiednia równowaga pomiędzy światem człowieka a natury. Poeta poszukuje wyznaczników tradycji mówionej, zarówno przedzierając się przez kolejne projekcje cywilizacji przykrywające sam kontynent, jak i zagłębiając się w koncepcje kultur prymitywnych, nieświadomości oraz umysłu. Pozornie pojęcia te odnoszą się do tego, co zwie się amerykańską dziczą (*the wilderness*). Niemniej jednak, w zamian za ukazanie

pewnej ucieczki od społeczeństwa pochylającego się nad skutkami swej destrukcyjnej siły, Snyder naświetla fakt, że człowiek współczesny jest zespolony ze wszystkimi okresami dziejów, gdyż „nasiona wszelkich społecznych zwyczajów i struktur są [osadzone] w umyśle". Celowy wybór symboli, takich jak pióra i bursztyn, których proweniencja jest niezwykle bogata znaczeniowo i konceptualnie, a jednocześnie przynależą do tradycji oralnej, służy zestawieniu z pismem. Pismo natomiast przedstawione jest jako narzędzie nieobliczalnej siły, ponieważ „pisanie zastępuje pamięć".

Gabriela Marszołek

„Gib mir meine Feder und meinen Bernstein zurück" Gary Snyder von Zivilisation und Primitivismus

Zusammenfassung

Mit dem Zurückkommen auf die Konzeption, den amerikanischen Kontinent als ein Palimpsest von Routen zu betrachten, stellt Gary Snyder solchen primitiven Glauben der vergangenen Epochen, wie: Harmonie, wirkliche Werte, bestimmtes Gleichgewicht zwischen der menschlichen Welt und der Naturwelt wieder her. Der Dichter sucht die Maßstäbe der gesprochenen Tradition, indem er durch die den Kontinent bedeckenden Projektionen der Zivilisation vordringt und sich in die Konzeptionen von primitiven Kulturen, Ahnungslosigkeit und Geist vertieft. Diese Begriffe beziehen sich nur scheinbar darauf, was als amerikanische Wildnis (the wildernees) bezeichnet ist. Doch statt eine gewisse Flucht vor der gegen die Folgen ihrer destruktiven Kraft ankämpfenden Gesellschaft darzustellen, stellt Snyder fest, dass der heutige Mensch mit allen Geschichtsepochen verbunden ist, denn „Samen aller gesellschaftlichen Sitten und Gesellschaftsstrukturen stecken in dem Verstand". Die absichtliche Auswahl von solchen Symbolen, wie Feder und Bernstein, deren Herkunft bedeutungsvoll und konzeptuell ist, und die zur gesprochenen literarischen Tradition gehören, dient dazu, die Symbole mit dem Schreiben als einem Werkzeug unermesslicher Kraft gegenüberzustellen. So wird „das Gedächtnis durch das Schreiben ersetzt".